

Child Protection Policy
Vincent Mennonite Church
Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse
November 9, 2011

Vincent Mennonite Church is concerned with the safety, health, and well being of our children. Since their safety here is a major consideration, our church has implemented a child protection policy which includes a screening process for all workers in positions listed below to protect the children from emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. This system is also in place for the protection of our church and our workers from false allegations. The screening process includes filling out an application, interviewing with the Child Safety Team, and completing personal background checks. Should there ever be an allegation of abuse, a thorough investigation will be performed.

Our goal is to provide a safe environment for
children and youth as they learn about God and enjoy activities.

Mutual Accountability

Vincent Mennonite Church desires to promote accountability among its church workers. We believe that an actual instance of abuse or molestation may be avoided with a caring and sensitive implementation of the following policy. Since questionable or inappropriate behavior often precedes acts of child abuse and molestation, church workers will be trained to identify inappropriate behavior with children and youth. Workers will also be encouraged to warn each other when questionable behavior is displayed. Questionable behaviors are to be reported to the proper individuals as identified in the following Policy.

Selecting Workers

The application procedures for the Child Protection Policy at Vincent Mennonite Church apply to individuals in the following categories:

Staff (Ministerial and Secretarial)
Elected Leadership (If in contact with children)
Lay Minister of Youth
Lay Minister of Education
Jr. Sunday School Superintendent
Volunteer Workers and Helpers in Youth/Children Activities—
including, but not limited to the following:

- Teachers of Children and Youth Sunday school classes
- Senior High Youth Sponsors (For youth in grades nine through twelve)
- Son Seeker Youth Sponsors (For children ages 10 through eighth grade)
- Youth Helpers 18 and over
- Vacation Bible School Teachers and Helpers
- Children's Church Workers
- Volunteers on overnight stays
- Nursery Workers and Helpers
- **Youth workers under 18 (application procedure varies slightly as noted below)

The requirements:

1. Fill out an application provided by Vincent Mennonite Church
2. Interview with the Child Safety Team
3. Obtain criminal background check and child abuse clearances. The cost will be reimbursed by Vincent Mennonite Church upon review and approval.
4. Attend training provided by the Child Safety Team

**Clearances are not required for youth under 18. Youth ages 14 through 17 will be required to fill out an application and participate in an interview. A parent or guardian may be present during the interview.

Initially:

A Child Safety Team is to be appointed to ensure application forms are filled out by all persons currently in any position mentioned above. This Child Safety Team will review all returned forms and conduct interviews.

The Child Safety Team will follow up with all applicants to ensure the application form is received on a timely basis. If the form is not provided after follow-up from the Child Safety Team, then the person will be asked to resign from service. Approval or denial is to be determined as indicated below.

Subsequently:

The Child Safety Team will provide application forms to all persons who are interested in serving in any position mentioned above, review all returned forms, and conduct interviews.

The Child Safety Team will consist of a Pastoral staff member, one Elder (appointed by the Elder Team), and one Lay Minister (Lay Minister of Education or Lay Minister of Youth preferred, appointed by the Lay Ministry Team), with their duration of membership consistent with their terms of office. When selecting members for the Child Safety Team, consideration will be given to skills, training, and length of time appointees will be on the team in order to provide continuity. The Child Safety Team will select its Chairperson from among its members. The Child Safety Team will meet as needed, as called by the Chairperson.

Approval/Denial:

The Child Safety Team members must agree to approve an applicant for service. The Child Safety Team will prepare and send a letter to approved applicants, thanking them for submitting the application, their commitment to children, and their service to the church. A list of ALL approved applicants, in whatever capacity they wish to serve, will be made available to individuals responsible for the various activities involving children and youth. All application forms will be kept in a confidential locked file. In no case, may a person begin service until approved by the Child Safety Team.

The Pastor will meet with each person who has not been approved and explain the reason for the disapproval. The Pastor may offer the counseling services of the Church, if appropriate.

Confidentiality:

All proceedings must be kept in the strictest confidential trust of those involved. Returned forms, documentation of interviews, and all other such confidential material will be kept in a securely locked area. All files approved or denied are to be kept on file for 7 years.

Supervising Activity

Team Approach

A very effective safeguard for maintaining child protection is supervision of any activity involving youth or children by at least two qualified adults. Exceptions and clarifications are noted below:

- Church functions (e.g. Sunday school, Bible school, etc.) where classes are meeting in the main church building, a single teacher may lead the class, provided a door is open or windows are unobstructed, and all areas of the classroom are visible from the exterior, provided that multiple activities are in progress inside the church building.
- In the church house or facility external to the main church building, two adults are required to be present. This includes the youth Sunday school class and Wednesday evening youth activities held in the church house. (When two adults are not available, the activity will be moved to the main church building as outlined above.)
- For transportation to and from church-sponsored activities in a location away from the church grounds, in a vehicle with only one adult, there must be at least two youth.
- Under exceptional circumstances, in the event that there is no available transportation home, a volunteer can provide transportation for the youth. The volunteer will call a parent/guardian and a member of the Child Safety Team or leader of that activity (e.g. Youth sponsor, Bible School leader, etc.) prior to leaving the church and upon arrival at the youth's home, noting the departure and arrival times, in order to provide accountability.
- As outlined in the section on the nursery policies, the nursery may be staffed by either two adults or by one adult and one teenage helper.

Parental Permission

Youth/Children must have parental permission for involvement in church activities where the informational form will be updated annually or as needed. Parents/Guardians of youth/children going on special activities, including but not limited to special trips and overnight activities, will be required to fill out an additional permission form.

General Guidelines

The following guidelines are for the worker's/volunteer's protection. These guidelines are meant to create and instill an awareness of the vulnerability to civil and criminal liability.

Do

- Team up with another adult staff member or volunteer when counseling minors.
- Meet in public places
- Advise other staff of your activities (where, when, who you are meeting with)
- Be accountable
- Be gender sensitive (female: female / male: male)
- Keep physical contact to a minimum (i.e.: a "hello hug") and in public areas
- Have two adult workers (minimum) on extended field trips (i.e.: all day or overnight)
- Keep groups together; use the "buddy system" for older children
- Refrain from corporal punishment (spanking, hitting, slapping, etc)

Do NOT

- Meet one-on-one with minors behind closed doors
- Hold “secret” meetings with minors
- Check a minor for injuries under clothing without another adult present
- Exchange kisses with children
- Allow an older child to take a younger child to the restroom
- Use unkind words with children and with others

Suspicious Behavior

All workers will agree not to engage in any behavior that would intentionally harm a child emotionally or physically. All workers will agree not to engage in any behavior that would involve sex or sexuality with any child, including inappropriate touching (i.e. backrubs, full body hugs, allowing older children to sit on lap, kissing, etc.), intimate sexual contact, sexual gestures, sexual/lewd jokes and statements, exhibitionism, and actions or speech designated to encourage sexual experimentation.

Suggested Procedure for Discussing Suspicious Behavior:

Minor Concern: Staff or volunteer worker seeing inappropriate behavior takes the one in error aside and caringly confronts.

Moderate Concern: Staff or volunteer worker observing inappropriate behavior immediately intervenes if a child is being threatened and will immediately report to a member of the Child Safety Team.

Major Concern: Staff or volunteer worker seeing inappropriate behavior immediately intervenes for protection of child, and reports to a member of the Child Safety Team. The Pastor is also immediately informed.

Suspicious behavior will bring prompt warnings. Multiple minor concerns and single moderate concerns will lead to the individual’s behavior being monitored. All concerns will be submitted in writing to the Child Safety Team, and major concerns will lead to immediate suspension, pending investigation.

Training

All workers will be trained regarding prevention of and signs of child abuse. Providing instruction for volunteers and staff is the responsibility of the Lay Ministry Team. The Child Safety Team may provide advice and input for this training. Workers are to understand that sexual relationships with minors can lead to a criminal conviction and imprisonment. All staff and volunteers will go through an initial training. Subsequent ongoing training should be provided as needed. Makeup training sessions will be made available by the Child Safety Team.

Provide Adequate Personnel

Supervision should be maintained before and after all events while children and/or youth are present.

Nursery

Procedures must be implemented and enforced in the church nursery to clearly identify the child and the child's parent/guardian. The following procedures will be adhered to whenever possible:

1. The Nursery must be staffed by at least two scheduled qualified volunteers (at least one adult).
2. The staff assigned by the Nursery Coordinator should not consider visitors as appropriate personnel to replace the assigned staff.
3. Lights must be kept on at ALL times.
4. The child shall only be released to parent/guardian or a person approved by the parent/guardian.
5. Have parents change the child's diaper if at all possible.
6. When taking the child to the bathroom, an adult should stand outside the stall and maintain voice contact. If the child needs help, call on someone to get the parent.
7. If a child needs to have clothing changed, a parent will be called in.

Six Month Rule

All volunteer children/youth workers must have attended Vincent Mennonite Church for a minimum of six months before they can be approved to serve. *The only exception to this requirement is granted to parents wishing to attend an overnight event which their child(ren) will be attending. (Two qualified adults must also be in attendance on an overnight event.)*

Reporting Procedures

Rationale

Child sexual abuse thrives when it goes unnoticed or unreported. An effective reporting procedure enhances the effort to protect children. As a church body, we have a moral obligation to fulfill in protecting our children.

Discrete and confidential reporting of suspected abuse is critical to abuse prevention. All volunteer workers have a moral obligation to report suspected child abuse. Reporting reflects caring and is not an act of disloyalty. Persons who report actual or suspected abuse in good faith are protected by law from liability.

Making a Report

Workers will report to a member of the Child Safety Team when a child displays the following indicators or when possible abusive or unhealthy activities are suspected. Although these indicators do not prove that abuse has taken place, they are warning signs of possible problems.

POSSIBLE INDICATORS AND SYMPTOMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Physical signs may include:

- lacerations and bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing

Behavioral signs may include:

- anxiety when approaching church or nursery area
- nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- “acting out” sexual behavior
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- I don't like (a particular church worker)
- (A church worker) does things to me when we're alone
- I don't like to be alone with (a church worker)
- (A church worker) fooled around with me

Note: Not all abuse of children is done by an adult. Child abuse may also be done by a child or by children.

Any allegations of abuse must be documented in writing (form attached) and immediately reported to a member of the Child Safety Team. All mild, moderate, and major concerns as described above must be submitted in writing to the Child Safety Team.

Vincent Mennonite Church will provide training for workers and staff regarding reporting procedures. Training sessions will present the church policy on reporting abuse, the rationale behind the need for reporting, and the necessity to provide feedback to one another concerning questionable behavior honestly and discretely, without creating an atmosphere of fear or suspicion. Workers will have opportunity to dialog with the Child Safety Team.

Response Procedures

Since no practical prevention strategy can be 100 percent effective, it is possible for an accusation of child abuse to occur in any church. Vincent Mennonite Church will follow the plan listed below in responding to abuse allegations.

Response Plan

Vincent Mennonite Church will take all allegations seriously. We will make every effort to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

The Child Safety Team will maintain up-to-date, confidential, secure, but accessible records of workers' applications and screening forms.

The Child Safety Team will designate a specific spokesperson for Vincent Mennonite Church who, as a church representative, will respond to the media and the congregation regarding any incident in a discrete, informed, and diplomatic way.

Vincent Mennonite Church will comply with the state of Pennsylvania's reporting requirements and give full cooperation to civil authorities. We reserve the right to have an attorney present while answering any investigative questions from law enforcement or social service agencies.

The Church will work closely with both the insurance company and the denomination to obtain information regarding specific guidelines and procedures that they endorse.

This Child Protection Policy comprises our church's position regarding child protection. This document may be released if an allegation of abuse occurs. Our policy will allow us to emphasize our awareness of the problem of child abuse, our concern for victims, and the steps we have taken to provide a safe environment for children and youth.

If an Allegation Occurs

In the case of an actual allegation, Vincent Mennonite Church will take the following steps:

1. Document all of our efforts at handling the actual allegation.
2. Contact ChildLine (PA State Child Abuse Registry) (800-932-0313) if child abuse is suspected. We will take their required action.
3. Secure the safety of the child or youth member before confronting the accused.
4. Notify the parents of the victim, and notify the parents of the accused, if the accused is a minor.
5. Take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. We will extend pastoral resources as needed. Our first priority is the care and safety of the victim.
6. Treat the accused with dignity and support. Care must be taken to avoid publicity of the offense and the name of the offender. If the accused is a church worker, that person will be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is completed. If the person is a paid employee, the Elders shall make a determination to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
7. Use the text of a prepared public statement to respond to the press and to convey news to the congregation. We will be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

Child Abuse Prevention Goal of Vincent Mennonite

Vincent Mennonite Church is concerned with the safety, health, and well being of our children. Because child safety is an important consideration for children and youth involved in church activities, Vincent Mennonite Church has implemented a child protection policy in order to protect children from emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. The Child Protection Policy is also in place to protect our church and our workers from false allegations.

Our goal is to provide a safe environment for children and youth as they learn about God and enjoy activities.

Today's Date: _____

Application for Children's/Youth Ministry Worker Vincent Mennonite

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. This is not an employment application form. Persons seeking a position in the church as a paid employee will be required to complete an employment application in addition to this screening form. The information obtained on this form is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities.

Personal

Name _____
Last First Middle

Date of Birth _____

Identity must be confirmed with a state driver's license or other photographic identification (attach photocopy of document).

Are you a Christian? _____ Baptized? _____

Present Address: _____

How Long at Address? _____ Street City State Zip

Previous Address: _____

How Long at Address? _____ Street City State Zip

Home Phone: () _____ Work Phone: () _____

Marital Status: Married _____ Single _____ Engaged _____ Separated _____
Divorced _____ Widowed _____

Do you have a valid driver's license? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please list your driver's license number and classification. _____

Have you been convicted of a traffic offense in the past 5 years? Yes _____ No _____

(Relevant as it relates to transportation of children)

Leaving any of the following questions unanswered would indicate that you prefer to discuss them with a designated counselor. Answering yes or leaving any of the questions unanswered may not automatically disqualify an applicant.

Have you ever been charged and/or convicted of a criminal offense? Yes _____ No _____

(If yes, please explain ~ attach a separate page, if necessary.)

Have you ever been charged and/or convicted of child abuse or a crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain. _____

Church History and Prior Ministry Experience

Name of church of which you are a member: _____

List (name and address) other churches you have attended regularly during the past 5 years: _____

List all previous church work involving children or youth (list each organization's name and address, type of work performed, and dates). _____

List all previous non-church work involving children or youth (list each organization's name and address, type of work performed, and dates). _____

List any gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for work with children or youth: _____

Ministry Preference and Availability

Please indicate the type of work with children or youth you prefer _____

Age Preference: K-6 Where Needed: Nurture: Preschool Grades

Jr. High/Son seekers High School/Youth

Please indicate the date you would be available to begin _____

What is the minimum length of commitment you can make? _____

Applicant's Statement

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any reference or churches listed in the application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children's or youth work. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by Vincent Mennonite, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Constitution and policies of Vincent Mennonite, and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

I further state that **I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE OF MY OWN FREE ACT.** This is a legally binding agreement that I have read and understand.

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18): _____ Date: _____

Children/Youth Ministries Interview Checklist Vincent Mennonite Church

Applicant's Name _____

Interviewers' Names _____

Interview Date _____ Place _____ Time _____

Application completed by applicant

Interview Procedure

Introduce yourself

Review information on application

Ask to see their driver's license/photo ID to verify name and make a photo copy. If they have a P.O. Box, get the street address where they live.

Check living situation: Spouse, roommate (same sex, relative), we are called to live lives of purity before the Lord. _____

Follow up as appropriate to any of these screening questions (criminal or traffic charges, abuse of child). Be sensitive and polite, striving to minister acceptance to the person. _____

Church Activity

Must have attended at least 6 months.

Confirm Vincent Mennonite Church membership. (Please note: Membership is not required but is preferred for teachers, nursery workers, and classroom helpers.)

Please circle - YES or NO

Spiritual Background

"Tell me how you came to know Jesus as your personal Savior?"
 Listen for clues of true salvation. Double-check "religious" words, grand sweeping or inherited salvations ("I've just known God my whole life" or "My mother was a Baptist") _____

Has the applicant been baptized? We strongly recommend all workers to be obedient and follow through with being baptized. If they need the information, ask them to speak with church staff. _____

Verify that applicant signed and dated the application.

Interviewer's notes:

- Note preference for age assignment

- Note any special conditions to assignment

Close in prayer

To Complete Interview: If you feel good about the interview, tell the individual that he/she will be notified with a decision. If they do not receive a call, they are free to call us. If you have a concern about

them being in Children's and/or Youth Ministries, tell them that you will give the application to the appropriate person and we will contact them. If you realize by the end of the interview that the individual should not be serving children or youth in any capacity, make a note immediately following the interview.

After Interview is complete,

Write any additional notes on this sheet or application that you feel the Children's and /or Youth staff should know about the applicant.

Give this sheet, application, and authorization form to designated person.

Interviewer's Signature _____

Parental Consent Form
Vincent Mennonite Church

Name _____ Age _____ Birth date _____
Address _____ Phone (____) _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
School _____ Grade in or just completed _____
Parents (s) work, home and/or cell phones _____

To whom it may concern:
The undersigned does hereby give permission for our child (my) child, _____
to attend and participate in activities sponsored by _____ Vincent Mennonite Church
on _____ .
(Date)

We (I) authorize an adult, in whose care the minor has been entrusted, to consent to any X-ray examination, anesthetic, medical, surgical or dental diagnosis or treatment, and hospital care, to be rendered to the minor under the general or special supervision and on the advice of any physician or dentist licensed under the provisions of the Medical Practice Act on the medical staff of a licensed hospital, whether such diagnosis or treatment is rendered at the office of said physician or at said hospital.

The undersigned shall be liable and agree(s) to pay all costs and expenses incurred in connection with such medical and dental services rendered to the aforementioned child pursuant to this authorization.

Should it be necessary for our (my) child to return home due to medical reasons or otherwise, the undersigned shall assume all transportation costs.

The undersigned does also hereby give permission for our (my) child to ride in any vehicle designated by the adult in whose care the minor has been entrusted while attending and participating in activities sponsored by Vincent Mennonite Church.

Health Insurance Yes No

Insurance company _____

Policy number _____

Insurance phone number _____

Participant/Member
Group number _____

Please check here if, on the reverse side of this page, you have listed any allergies or special medical problems your child may have.

Thank you.

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18): _____ Date: _____

Overnight Permission Letter Vincent Mennonite Church

I give my permission for _____ to attend a church function overnight on
(Name of Child)

_____ at _____. I understand this event begins at
(Date) (Place)

_____ and ends at _____.
(Time) (Time)

I also understand that these are the basic rules for this overnight event, which have been agreed upon by the group and volunteers:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

If my child or their guest(s) has problems with these ground rules, I agree to pick him or her up immediately.

Sincerely,

Parent/guardian: _____

Date: _____

